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White but not quite: normalizing colonial conquests through spatial mimicry

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Abstract

Mimicry's role in the way social identities are constructed and deconstructed has considerably enriched our understanding of various power relations. However, as a spatial practice, mimicry has received scant consideration. In what ways can space itself become an object of mimicry? What strategies and practices are involved in the process and what is their political objective? The current paper deals with these questions by focusing on the processes of mimetic spatial production bent on turning Mount Hermon, an occupied territory under Israel's control, into “an ordinary” western ski resort. Yet this concerted effort to normalize a colonial space encountered different kinds of tensions and contradictions that provide a test case to the convoluted ways in which mimicry of space, and not just in space, continually generates various forms of slippage, excess and ambivalences.

Keywords: Mimicry, Zionism, Occupation, Colonialism, Material incongruities, Whiteness, Hermon,

Couched in post-colonial critique, mimicry has been conceptualized as an act that exposes the inherent contradictions embedded in the effort to shape subjects according to political and cultural norms. By discussing the desire to become "white," mimicry, on the one hand, underscores the colonized subject's aspiration to adopt the settlers' customs and norms, and the inherent inability to fully emulate the settler's "whiteness" (Bhabha 1984). On the other hand, mimicry can become a subversive strategy that exposes how identities are constructed and stratified through power relations. So although mimicry confirms hegemonic ideals and dominant modalities, it also inadvertently reflects the intrinsic flexibility, contingency, and context-dependence of all social and political concepts.

The exploration of the various performances of mimicry has considerably enriched our understanding of power relations, modes of control, and ways of disciplining in a wide range of circumstances and through various prisms. Yet more should be said on the way in which space itself, and not just the subjects within it, can become an object of and for mimicry. Put differently, as a performed act, mimicry can be written on the skin, imprinted on the body, articulated by language, expressed in dress or uttered through certain gestures. Notwithstanding its various embodiments, mimicry tends to allude, however, to a certain state of mind, whether it is the outcome of an inner conflict between the desire to identify with the dominant group and the inherent inability to become part of it or whether it is triggered from an anxiety that one might be recognized as belonging to an excluded minority while trying to pass as a part of

hegemonic society. Either way, mimicry is concerned with constructing the self and as such is methodologically examined in order to better understand the convoluted ways in which human subjectivity is formed. The question I am interested in is in what way can space itself also become an object of mimicry? What strategies and practices are involved in the process of producing mimetic space? And, just as importantly, what is the political objective of this process?

The current essay approaches these questions by exploring the process in which a state strives to normalize a space that has been occupied and is still contested. Normalization here relates to the way in which the Mount's natural snowy landscape was employed in order to create a pacified colonial geography and to render it as a "normal" part of the state rather than a colonized enemy territory. More specifically, I focus on the spatial manifestations of mimicry in Mount Hermon located at the northern tip of the Golan Heights, situated between Israel, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. In June 1967 most of the Golan Heights (1,250 sq km) was occupied by Israeli forces in addition to the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Sinai Peninsula (Zisser 2002). Israel currently controls 70 sq. km of the Hermon and regards it as a strategic military stronghold. Simultaneously, though, Israel has also transformed the mountain into a popular tourist resort, mainly through the establishment of a ski site which attracts 400,000 Israeli tourists each year, which amount to over 5% of the population.

In this paper, I argue that the attempts to normalize Israel's occupation of Mount Hermon were contrived through a process of mimetic spatial production bent on making the mountain into "an ordinary" ski resort, by deliberately fashioning the Hermon as a Swiss Alp of sorts. The act of spatial mimicry was crafted as a strategy of normalizing the colonial conquest, first by cleansing the local population and then by controlling and manipulating the space itself and the

visiting public. However, topographic conditions, natural climate, the tension between the area's location as a warzone and as a tourist resort as well as the behavior of Israelis visitors accentuated the exceptionality of the ski site, thus hampering the efforts to govern the contested area and to normalize it by mimicry.

The paper's main objective is to discuss how colonial territory is normalized through the manipulation of its own resource in order to enable and act of mimicry, a practice that is inherent to colonial contexts which enables to whiten its occupation. And to relate this process to with the practices and means through which Israel colonial reality is manifested. In order to this and rather than discussing mimicry as an act of human agency, I underscore its relation to the production of space. that is constructed as a “natural” landscape, rather than focusing on the way “artificial” edifices are produced to mimic certain architectural styles. Furthermore, in this particular case we witness an inversion of the traditional role of spatial mimicry, since it is deployed to shape the comportment of the colonizers rather than the colonized.

Following a brief literature review, I examine a range of archival material while using in-depth interviews to analyze the construction of the Mount Hermon ski resort, particularly the ways in which its normalcy was articulated, evaluated, and indeed materially produced. Next, I explore the incongruences between the site's functionality as a popular ski resort, as a national icon, and as an actual war zone. By way of conclusion, the relations between spatial mimicry and the geo-political are revisited.

Mimicry and Space

Mimicry's role in the way social identities are constructed and deconstructed (Bhabha 1984; Butler 1993) has been thoroughly explored especially its subversive and disruptive potential and

the limitation of its various transgressive effects in relation to sexuality (Andrade 1994), gender and race (Ahmed 1999; Rottenberg 2003). Its various roles have been noted in the construction of national ideologies (Huggan 1994; Boyarin 2000; Boym 2008) as well as the functions it plays in producing forms of disciplined knowledge such as archeology (Panja 2002), linguistics (Hill 1999), international relations (Shani 2008), medicine (Langford 1999), and law (Lipset 2004). The performance of Mimicry has also been unraveled in seemingly mundane political process such electoral campaigns (Fröhling, Gallaher and Jones 2001). In addition its manifestation through various representation mediums have been dealt with (Taussig 1993), whether in the field of literature (Kien Ket 2002), film (MacKenzie 1994) or other venues such as caricatures, (Khanduri 2009) and internet blogs (Abdul Jabbar 2003), even providing a paradigmatic frame to radically rethink biblical texts (Leander 2010).

However, as a spatial practice, mimicry has received scant consideration despite the potential poignancy such an approach has within the general contribution of post-colonial scholarship to our understanding of the various tactics, practices and strategies involved in the production of space (Sparke 1998; Sidaway 2000; King 2003). This is intriguing because mimicry is first and foremost a phenomena that is dependent on space, for its ability to trigger an effect hinges on its location (Bhabha 1994), on being in the right or wrong "place" (Alcedo 2007), or position (Hoelscher 2003), from which one is able to transgress "normality" or alternatively, to pass as being "normal" (Rottenberg 2008).

Furthermore, mimicry can be gauged through its effect on space. Jane Hill, for example, examines English speakers' use of "mock Spanish" as a form of mimicry, showing how language becomes figuratively and socially white through its deployment in space (Hill 1999). For Shompa Lahiri mimicry is crucial in understanding how colonial migrants gain inclusion into the

diverse imperial and national spaces of Britain (Lahiri 2003), while James Ferguson raises ethical questions on the geopolitical location of Africa vis-à-vis Europe through discussing mimicry in a globalized world (Ferguson 2002). Mimicry has also been considered in states of siege and conflict zones as in the Cypriot case where an embattled Muslim minority was "engaged in a form of mimicry, imitating the cultural fashions of Turkey, eventually even employing mimetic models of Turkish sovereignty" (Bryant and Hatay 2011: 644).

Yet more than just a location *for* mimicry, space is also an object *of* mimicry. Indeed, the important role of colonial architecture, both in its attempt to mimic the metropole and in the part it played in encouraging the colonized to mimic the colonizer has been well documented (Metclaf 1989) as well as the subversive potential that is produced during the imitation of dominating norms (Morton 1998; Le Roux 2004). It seems that becoming "like but not quite" is embedded in the production of built space, whether it is memorial monuments and museums which reflect a certain image that is regularly imitated (Demissie 2003; Feldman 2007) or a series of other edifices, from socialist people houses (Lindenmeyr 2012) to capitalist western shopping malls (Erkip 2003; Small 2011; Schmidt 2012). These architectural edifices aim to project a certain ethos, which the population inhabiting them is meant to adopt.

Spatial mimicry occurs in other various sites, scales and locations. The spatial organization of the American frontier, for example, became entwined with theological discourses that sought to shape a built environment that mimicked the "Promised Land" and in this way to imbue the settler's with a certain sense of morality (DeRogatis 2003). In 1950's Turkey, casinos became disciplinary spaces where visitors were expected to perform prevailing "western norms" (Gürel 2011: 168, 183). Israeli checkpoints in the Palestinian occupied territories are usually constructed as border terminals in order to emulate a sense of contained sovereignty through which

subjugated populations are controlled and ruled (Amir 2013). In addition, they can transform into sites where mimicry is performed as a subversive strategy (Mansbach 2012).

While constructed and built environments are often embedded with a certain mimetic quality, “natural” landscapes (the central topic of this paper) can also become objects for imitation and emulation which in turn transform into sites of governance, both of space and population. The various manipulations employed to transform “natural” landscapes so that they will correlate with and encourage a set of propositions, beliefs, dispositions and orientations have been discussed by several commentators (Grove 1991; Pratt 1992; Cronon 1995). One important aspect of the investigation into the production of natural environments deals with the efforts to render colonial space more “proper” or suitable for settler colonialists. In his ethnography on European colonial experience in Zimbabwe, David McDermott Hughes has discussed how the settlers’ ascribed whiteness was negotiated by a physical alteration of the African landscape. The desire to become local, he explains, entailed a manipulation of space evident for example in irrigation schemes bent on producing waterscapes that would turn the African land into a European home (Hughes 2010: 29-69).

Climate and location were a determinant factor in locating European whiteness, not just as subjective identification with place but as a form of governance (Livingstone 1991; Hughes 2010: 13-15). Judith Kenny (1993), for example, discusses how certain highland regions in India gradually became the official temporal-turned-permanent residence of British officials and bureaucrats. She demonstrates how these “Hill Stations” were specifically chosen because of their resemblance to the English countryside and how they were assumed to be suitable for English folks due to their “European climate.” Investigating French reforestation schemes in Algeria, Caroline Ford (2008) draws similar conclusions in relation to the interaction between

environment, climate, landscape and race. She portrays how the practice of reforestation was linked to an anxiety that the French colonial project might succumb to the local climate and environment (much like the Roman Empire before it had) and emphasizes how environmental norms that suited France's geographical contours were employed in the Algerian landscape in a way that disenfranchised the indigenous population.

Although spatial mimicry is alluded to in the above mentioned studies, it is not the focus of the argument. Hence, the way in which space itself can become an object of mimicry, the normative discourse entangled to such an effort, and the ambivalence it stirs should be examined more extensively. This paper tries to engage with such issues by discussing mimicry within the context of Israel's spatial discourse. Eitan Bar Yosef (2004) describes the Israeli and Zionist involvement in Africa, showing how questions of the "proper" environment and climate for European settlement have occupied Zionist thinking. Similarly, Haim Yacobi claims that mimicry is an inherent phenomenon of Israeli-built environment (Yacobi 2008), but little attention was given so far to the way in which natural landscape can also transform into a site of mimicry as described in relation to other colonial geographies such as Algiers or Zimbabwe.

This paper will attempt to begin filling this gap by examining spatial mimicry in the natural environments of the occupied Golan Heights, and to show how space was produced in order to normalize its own contested signification and to alleviate the tensions that arose from the act of colonization which included ethnic cleansing and spatial demolition. Although numerous studies have examined the ways in which Israel has governed the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, only a limited number of studies have focused on the Golan Heights (Davis 1984; Muslih 1999; Kipnis 2009; Lavi 2013). This is unfortunate considering that the relevance of postcolonial critique to the Golan stems not only from the mere fact that the territory was colonized, but also from the

particular mechanisms that have been deployed to materialize the territory's normalization. This paper aims to deconstruct these mechanisms and present how they were employed in order to shape a (ski) site of mimicry.

The Colonial Geography of Mount Hermon and the Golan Heights

Israel's main reason for occupying the Hermon was its geostrategic military importance as the highest observation position in the area of the Golan Heights. However, immediately following the occupation, the Hermon and the Golan Heights, were also surveyed extensively for potential civilian uses, primarily tourism and agriculture. Immediately after the 1967 war, civil engineers, rural planners, veterinarians, agronomists, agricultural advisors, hydrologists, and land preservation and drainage engineers toured the area and gathered information with the objective of enabling the country to maximize its use of the territory. For instance, four different kinds of crops were planted by the Ministry of Agriculture and a survey was conducted to inspect the terrain's mineral ingredients.¹ Such efforts became part of an array of tactics deployed to normalize and govern the newly occupied territory.

From the outset, the actual whiteness of the space became entangled with the effort to normalize the Israeli conquest of the region. The snow on the peak of the Hermon Mountain became a major concern for the military and civilian teams. Already in January 1968, six months after the war, an official at Israel's Nature Reserves Authority, the governmental branch charged with managing the country's parks and reserves, told the military high command that snow made the Hermon "a unique site for the citizens of Israel" and an "exceptional treasure not found anywhere else [in the country]."² State officials and military personal, accompanied by

civilian volunteers from a newly created Israeli ski club, surveyed the mountain by aerial reconnaissance aiming to identify the best skiing spots. The military was also involved in efforts to evaluate the mountain's climate conditions, the duration of the ski season and expected levels of snow, as well as to estimate the number of potential visitors and to locate sites for a winter sports center.³

A new governmental body – the Hermon Authority – was soon established and placed under the military's responsibility. It was composed of officials from the Ministry of Tourism, Israel's Land Administration, the Nature Reserve Authority and the Zionist Organization's Settlement Department, and its main role was to regulate movement to the mountain, set a tariff for the public, and provide the conditions needed to allow private entrepreneurs to turn the mountain into a ski resort.⁴

The desire to turn the Hermon into a ski resort led policy makers to instruct the military to demolish the main village on the mountain's slopes, Jubata ez-Zeit. According to military reports, the village was located at an important junction that seemed "suitable for developing activities in the Hermon, a fact that entails [its] destruction."⁵ All Israeli representatives involved in the management of the Hermon pressed for prompt action. "I hear there is a lot of action going on in the Golan", wrote the head of the Nature Reserves Authority on March 1968 to the director of the Land Administration, the body entrusted with managing most of the Golan's occupied land through the military government; "is it not possible to clear Jubata soon?" he asked.⁶

The destruction itself was not an isolated incident but part of a larger scheme to reshape the Golan's landscape, a territory of approximately 1,250 km, which had been populated by 147,613 residents in more than 270 villages and farms. Within a few months of the occupation, the region

was almost completely emptied of its indigenous inhabitants who fled or were expelled during the war. Most villages were systematically destroyed during this "whitening process," ensuring that no one could return to them. Only 6,400 Druze Syrian residents were allowed to remain in the Golan (Shai 2006; Harris 1980). Some villages, like Jubata, were declared sites of "architectural, landscape, or archeological value" to be partly spared from demolition. But Jubata was nevertheless evacuated, its 1,500 residents driven into neighboring villages and into Syria, and the buildings were razed to the ground (Murphy and Gannon 2008: 149, 160-172; Kipnis 2009: 338).⁷

Israel's insistence on destroying the village attests to its broader intention of achieving, through the development of the ski resort, a certain purification of the space and a transformation of a potential warzone into an investment opportunity thus fulfilling the political whitening of the contested region by turning it into a "proper" colonial space.

Space making in Israel has always been linked to a settler colonial ethos that sought to reproduce an "European white society in the new geographical setting" and "entailed near-total dispossession and exclusion of indigenous groups" (Yiftachel and Segal 1998: 478).

Ruination of space and its portrayal as vacant is a dominant feature in Israel's settler colonial ethos that is connected to a sense of anxiety which arose from encounters with the indigenous population (Leshem 2013). Similarly the Golan Heights occupation was based on an articulated anxiety as the area was used by the Syrian army in order to bombard Israeli settlements along the border and was perceived as a space that poses a significant danger to the state. This anxiety also propelled the vast desolation of the Golan territory which in turn entailed a need to whiten the occupation, as one of Israel's most prominent columnists described it:

In the beginning there was fear: the Syrian plateau posed a tangible threat to the valley. Then the remaining residents were removed. Their expulsion was necessary. The [Israeli] Labor movement does not occupy anything other than wilderness; where the wilderness was not complete, it took care to make it complete... (Barnea 1994).

In the case of the Golan Heights the ruination of space was normalized through exploiting the material whiteness of the Hermon's snow. The removal of the indigenous population and the demolition of their villages prepared the ground for the spatial mimicry, which included the construction of a ski-resort (and later numerous wineries) alongside quaint European style settlements. The objective was to normalize the contested region by producing its space as if it were part of Europe, which is how Israel conceived of itself. The ethnic cleansing and massive demolition of lived space in the Golan enabled its presentation as a "normal" place, which one Israeli journalist characterized as "more Israeli than Israel itself, an ideal version of Israel as we would like it to be: without Palestinians or intifadas but with breathtaking views, pleasing wines and agreeable residents, with horses, crocodiles, and skiing" (Shalev 2010).⁸

That the chosen site was manipulatively designed as western and was oriented toward producing a perceived European place can be discerned from the practices deployed during its construction. First, the involvement of western capital and knowledge became noticeable, with the famous Jewish philanthropist Baron De-Rothschild hiring French experts to survey the ski site's construction, while Israeli civil engineers were sent to Switzerland to acquaint themselves with the requirements of motorways that operate in conditions of snow and ice. The Austrian government even offered scholarship residencies for ski instructors. Such endeavors pointed to the explicit desire to establish the site as a proper European ski resort.⁹ Like encounters in Zimbabwe or India this notion of whiteness entailed the negation of the indigenous population's

presence. In the case at hand, the colonized soil and climate engendered the sensation of whiteness among the colonizers themselves by envision an imagined European landscape which was foreign both to the territory itself and to the colonizers themselves.

. Though unlike the other examples, this whiteness was not based on introducing new elements (such as forests or water reservoirs) but by relying on the existing resources. In other words, the whitening process was enabled by a forceful alteration of the physical landscape which included the removal of an indigenous population and the destruction of its lived environment and then was followed by a decision to construct a ski resort on the same cleansed space thus rescaling it from a Middle East to Europe.

Sarah Ahmed notes that the colonizing mission assumes that the colonized subject can reflect back the values and practices of the colonizer, but at the same time, limits must be drawn in order to secure whiteness (Ahmed 1999: 97; see also Gordon 2010). Despite the concerted effort to normalize the Golan Heights through spatial mimicry, different kinds of tensions and contradictions constantly emerged. First, the Golan's materiality did not really lend itself to European mimicry. Second, the behavior of the thousands of Israeli tourists who frequented the region each year and were unaccustomed to the forms of comportment associated with the newly created "European" space turned the spatial mimicry into an act of public mockery. Finally, the geopolitical significance of Mount Hermon, particularly its location in the midst of growing armed conflict, continuously undermined the efforts to reshape it as a pastoral European or New England landscape. The following parts of the paper will re-consider how these factors rendered the whiteness of the Harmon's more insecure than safe -- how the space could become white but not quite.

Material Incongruities

The desire to shape Mount Hermon according to western ideals became fully apparent with the designation of the area's first group of new settlers – bound for the same spot where the now ruined village of Jubata ez-Zeit had stood. Whereas most of the new settlers in the Golan consisted of young Israeli volunteers affiliated with the labor Zionist movement which established communes and collectives (Gorenberg 2006: 72-99), in the Hermon the franchise to run the site was handed over to a settling group of newly arrived immigrants from the US, England, New Zealand, Denmark, France, Holland, Switzerland, Greece, and Brazil. Naming their new settlement "Ramat Shalom" (i.e., The Peace Plateau), the group presented itself as "a completely self-contained village community ... [that] is based on private enterprise. The founders of Ramat Shalom are a group of western immigrants possessing a wide variety of professional and business experience".¹⁰

Despite its professed free market ideology, Ramat Shalom received considerable support from the state. Representatives of the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption personally chaperoned the group, smoothing out any bureaucratic entanglements along their way. All members enjoyed prepaid housing. The land of Jubata ez Zeit was delivered to them directly, without competing with other bidders, and was leased from Israel's Land Administration via the military governor at a pittance. The Ministry of the Interior sent a special planning team consisting of architects, engineers, economists, and even sociologists to assess the settlement plans and set a reasonable timetable for the establishment of this "village of immigrants from prosperous countries."

The colonizing scheme formed part of a broader effort to transform the Hermon into an attractive site for visitors of many varieties, including families, hikers, and off course, skiers. As part of this project the Hermon Authority consulted botanists regarding the optimal types of plant

species for the area. All experts strongly objected to any kind of alpine forms of vegetation on the grounds that they would damage the indigenous habitat.¹¹ So while the efforts to mimic Europe were based on a clear and conscious choice, they were bound by certain material limitations. Although in the case of the plants, the indigenous had prevailed, the social composition of the settler's group clearly suggested that those chosen to fulfill the task of constructing a ski site in the Hermon were the ones who seemed most likely to prosper in a "western" environment.¹² Scott, the group's leader, received flattering media attention portraying him as the "prototype of the positivist [sic] American." He explained that the idea of privately-owned land would enable Ramat Shalom to become "like a small New-England town" (Dolev 1969).¹³ In other words, the declared objective was to design a quintessentially western site even while significant attributes of the mountain, such as its flora and fauna, were recognized to be distinctly other than European or New England.

Importantly enough, the professional planners who surveyed the Hermon acknowledged from the start that the mountain would draw mainly, if not solely, Israeli tourists. As a ski resort, they explained, the mountain's limited snowfall made it largely unappealing to foreign visitors.¹⁴ The whiteness of the mountain, it appeared, was unique and appealing only to the local public.

Indeed, Israelis flocked to the mountain in their thousands almost immediately after the war, even though the territory was still officially a closed military zone. "Who would have thought that we would find ourselves, before this fine spring season, offering beauty tips for skiing on the Hermon", one fashion columnist in an Israeli daily mused in 1968.¹⁵ When a ski tournament was held during the first winter following the mountain's occupation, the contestants were described as the kind of athletes that are "never seen on soccer fields or basketball courts: doctors, professors, elderly citizens and rich business men", echoing and reproducing the sport's elitist

reputation.¹⁶ But complaints about the new skiing attraction soon began to pile up. Visitors pointed to the poor management, in particular the site's untidiness and inefficient administration, but above all grumbled about the mountain's weather conditions, which could change from snow to rain overnight, leaving the site more muddy than snowy.

From mimicry to mockery

Not only the mountain with its erratic weather, but also the Israeli public, was considered insufficiently disciplined to fully appreciate the snow. "Bodies were crammed together, one person rubbing against another, the noise and commotion rose to high heaven, and the Hermon resembled a branch of the Israeli seashore", one journalist complained, echoing the wider sense that the Israeli public was oblivious to the "proper" conduct at a ski site. Another journalist concluded that the mountain had "gone white – from shame" (Shalev 1970). The Hermon Authority, a private tour guide complained, did not distinguish between the thousands of curious tourists who came to the resort dressed in summer clothing and the informed ski athletes. His own tours included "information regarding proper ski gear and the Hermon's topography, as well as a short film on European ski centers."¹⁷

The reference to a behavior which was more accustomed to a perceived Mediterranean surrounding rather than a European ski resort appears also in official correspondence of the Hermon Authority describing the inappropriate conduct of visitors and the growing problems of "running the mountain." Authority officials complained that the Israeli public was "not very disciplined", citing this as one of the main reasons for the frequent disorder.¹⁸ As one reporter explained, "In the battle between the hot Israeli temperament and the cold snow, the former is so far outmatching the latter" (Peri 1970).

Thus, the uniqueness of whiteness that aimed to normalize the occupation by attracting population as a mass accentuated instead the site's inability to become truly "European". The Israeli tourists were more amazed than accustomed to the sight of snow and acted accordingly. The public's conduct, which was regarded as inappropriate, emphasized how skiing was not a normal practice and this, turned, unintentionally, the act of spatial mimicry into an act of mockery. In other words, the recurring inability to induce 'proper' whiteness among the Israeli visitors tourists, shaped the way in which the governed population acted. Criticisms of the public's failure to fulfill the role envisioned for them in the production of the Hermon site are thus important to the understanding the multiple layers of white but not quite.

Just as important is the Israeli visitors' professed desire to feel "like in Europe" as a way to perform physical whiteness, since it underscores that the notion "white but not quite" differs in this case from the conventional way it is discussed in the mimicry literature. In most colonies, the colonial powers produced space that mimics the metropole in order to encourage the colonized to mimic the colonizer, while in the Israeli case, the colonial production of space was designed to encourage the colonial settler society to mimic a western or European idea.

Of course, the assumed binaric relations between colonized and colonizer are a bit more complex as "Europe" serves here as a potent geopolitical image rather than a concrete location; one which is time and again used in order to shape a national identity that regards itself considerably different from cultural and social characteristics it recognizes as part of the local orient (Newman 2000). It is in this frame that the ability to provide a distinctively "European" place, such as a ski site, gained considerable importance.

The influence of the Mediterranean region on Israel's culture iety has been extensively reviewed (Nockhe 2009; Ohana 2012). However In Israel "Mediterranean" has also become a

euphemism through which the orient is referred to in a derogatory and marginalizing way (Hochberg 2011). Yet by invoking the Mediterranean trope another noticeable tension becomes apparent albeit un-intentionally. For the Mediterranean is a liminal space, located on the fringes of orient and occident and such serves as a middling ground between the two. By comparing the Hermon atmosphere to the Mediterranean Sea shore, the formers own liminal positioning as a third space of sort is also flashed out. Yet the potential of the Hermon to transform into a liminal third space should also be taken with a grain of salt as the it also entailed the destruction of the local built environment and the removal of the indigenous population rather than their incorporation along with a forced transformation of the landscape which included the construction of a militarized array of outposts and fortification on the mount and in its vicinity.

Despite the difficulties the Hermon's ski manage to hold its ground, officially becoming from the 1970s the most important touristic site in Northern Israel. However, in 1984, an apparent crisis led to the site's closure. One reason was related to the material incongruity of the ski site's location. The fact that the snow was available for a relatively short period of about two months per year has created substantial economic difficulties. Furthermore, a streak of dry winters with insufficient snow accumulation seriously aggravated the financial revenues (Horowitz 1984). Yet the main reason for the crisis was that the site's skiing potential was largely unexploited. In the winter season of 1982-3, for example, 201,500 people visited the resort but only 15,200 actually skied.¹⁹ After the site was reopened, the operators' efforts were centered on training Israelis to ski. New trails were plowed, free skiing lessons were offered, and heavily discounted equipment was rented out, all in order to make Israelis friendlier to the idea

of skiing. New modes of governance were thus introduced in order to deepen as it were the spatial mimicry.

The decision to give the resort a professional makeover led to a sharp increase in its fees. Soon enough there was a public demand that the tariff will be lowered which was, and still is, rationalized by the claim that the snow is a unique resource which every Israeli has a right to enjoy from. On the other hand, the sites operators claimed that in order to be a "normal" ski site, unusually high prices must be paid as the site can only be open for a very short period of time. The Hermon's financial gain and national importance were thus contrasted. In order to be a successfully operational ski site it cannot become fully accessible to the Israeli public. In order to be fully accessible to the Israeli public, it cannot quite operate as a ski site.

Embattled Mimcry and Spatial Dissonance

Another aspect of the Hermon's "whiteness's insecurity" relates to its status as an occupied territory. From the initial construction of the ski resort the area was intermittently closed because of its location at the forefront of a continuing military escalation between Syria and Israel. In addition, its vicinity to the border with Lebanon, posed the threat of Palestinian militia fighters which infiltrated in order to attack civilian and military targets, including the ski site itself. In one case, Palestinian militia men launched several rockets from the Hermon's western slopes which killed an Israeli civilian in a nearby town, who ironically enough, had recently become a ski instructor. Another notable event was an incursion of Palestinian militia fighters into the ski site that managed to blow up some of its structures, thus rendering it inoperative for a considerable amount of time.²⁰

The fighting exacerbated the site's financial difficulties and testified to the suppressed fact that the ski resort was, despite all the efforts, part of a warzone. A heavily fortified military outpost was built in adjacent to the resort. The fortified encampment was not only constantly visible to tourists but also turned part of the ski slopes into a closed military zone. The fact that the road paved for the military outpost at the Hermon's peak was also designated as the main road serving the Israelis tourists, underscored the seamless fusion of the Hermon's two roles – as a military observation point and a lucrative tourist attraction.

Two years of inefficient management led to the dismantling of the Hermon Authority. The military disbanded it and authorized the Government Tourist Corporation, an executive governmental agency, to oversee the site's management while handing over the direct responsibility for its operation to a new settler group of ex-military servicemen. The group renamed the site Neve-Ativ, joining the Hebrew word for oasis with the acronym of several fallen comrades to lend a touristic appeal to a self-professed commemoration act. The settler entrepreneurs were assigned by the military to stage ambushes along the border as part of the effort to combat Palestinian militiamen trying to infiltrate from Lebanon, thus further blurring the line between the mountain's function as a military outpost and as a tourist resort.²¹

The constant tension between the acts of warfare and the longing for snow created an inherent contradiction that reflected another aspect of the mountain's inability to become white. The mountain's function as a strategic outpost prevented the site from being fully envisioned as western, and indeed underscored the differences between the actual site and the object of imitation. "Israel seems to have turned the Hermon slopes simultaneously into a battle ground and a tourist center", reported one Lebanese correspondent.²² "Skiing under the protection of armed soldiers", one newspaper declared, had, for too many visitors, come to seem "perfectly

normal. Perhaps they think that this is also a common sight in Switzerland" (Peri 1970). These dynamics manifested the anomaly of the alleged "normal" state of the Hermon and created a unique kind of spatial dissonance – it was as though the mountain's European surroundings were curtailed by its "Middle Eastern" presence.

In October 1973, Syria, together with Egypt, orchestrated a well-planned surprise attack on Israel and managed to re-conquer the Hermon. Unlike the 1967 Israeli conquest, which had been a minor military act, the battles waged in 1973 became a central event of the war, especially the campaign to re-occupy the mountain. After the 1973 October war, the gradual enforcement of the cease fire that concluded the war decreased the security threat in the Golan Heights. Yet despite the area becoming pacified, the spatial mimicry did not achieve its objective and the "whiteness's insecurity" constantly emerged. That the Hermon became a symbol of the war also meant that as a military asset, the Hermon's importance will always have to be articulated. There will always have to be an explanation why the Hermon is part of Israel, it can never be simply so.

This disparity was seemingly mitigated by the sight of snow which rendered the occupation of the territory somewhat obscured. Indeed, the Golan Heights which was emptied from its former residents became a popular location. The relative remoteness of the Golan to the rest of Israel, the removal of most of its residents during and after its occupation and its reshaping as an open landscape with unique sceneries and relatively cool climate during the winter, have rendered the act of visiting there part of a paradoxical strategy through which the Golan Heights is frequently marketed as a region that is "as European as can be," in the words of one tourism advertisement. Yet the latter also suggests that, the sight of snow also had an alienating effect as it created a surrounding that could be considered white but not quite Israeli.

The way in which the snow renders the Hermon foreign to the Israeli landscape paradoxically creates another element of the Hermon's unsecured whiteness. In the 1990s, negotiations between Israel and Syria reached a critical stage and an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights and the Hermon seemed plausible. While public concerns were raised about the serious military disadvantage of withdrawal, the efforts to Europeanize the mountain became a source of comic reflection on the alienated nature of the occupied space. The high numbers of visitors during the 1990s was typically described as a way of parting with the snow rather than asserting any sovereign claims over it. "When the people of Israel flock to the Hermon," one reporter explained, "it is not a show of solidarity with the Golan's settlers but an attempt to play it like Europeans and to throw the snow a goodbye party" (Gviratz 1996).

The sardonic tone emphasized a particular absurdity through which the Israelis experienced the snow, one that still features prominently in the reasoning for holding on to the Hermon. The Hermon might be white and attractive but is not considered an integral part of the national territory, in contrast for example to the way in which the West Bank is regarded as the biblical birthplace for the Jews (Yishai 1985). The whiteness of the snow therefore is a source of ambiguity; it plays both into the effort to assimilate and normalize the space, but at the same time highlights the difference between this space and the rest of Israel. Thus, the attempt to mimic foreign landscape and the formation of the Golan Heights as place one mainly visits rather than actually live in (in contrast to the West Bank which was extensively colonized by Israeli settlers) rendered the Hermon not quite white and also not enough Israeli.

Conclusion

In her ethnographic work on Northern Cyprus, an unrecognized polity and an international pariah state, anthropologist Yael Navaro Yashin invites readers, to ‘sense’ the political underlying contexts that normalize disruption (Navaro Yashin 2003). Yet rather than normalize the abnormal she calls upon her readers to reflect on the abnormal qualities of the “normal.” Similarly the present work seeks to ask what are the contours of normality that were formed in the attempt to render a colonial space such as the Hermon as white? And what can be surmised from this contested whiteness on the way in which the materiality of "natural" and "neutral" environments is formed?

Perhaps Frantz Fanon's conception of being black can shed light on such normal anomalies as the Hermon's ascribed whiteness. For Fanon, colors become political only by juxtaposing them one against the other, the black becomes "black" only in relation to the “white” man (Fanon 1967). As presented here, whiteness is not just a question of race but also of space (Linke 2013). Like race, class and gender (Gibson 2012), so does the physicality of space, embody the interconnectivity between normalization and whitening process. But like Bhabha's notions of mimicry, space can never be fully white, it can never fully emulate the ideal it aspires to become.

Andy Clarno has noted that while "white South Africans are learning the language of colorblindness, urban space is still experienced through racial and class lenses and, for many, the space of the suburbs is still imagined as “white” space" (Clarno 2013). Indeed, suburban neighborhoods, gated communities, ghettos and slums are frequently imagined through a representational discourse which conflates race, ethnicity and class in order which conflates whiteness with the normal and black with deviancy (Linke 2013).

In the Hermon's case, the desire to replicate Europe entailed a removal of the indigenous population, the destruction of their lived environment and construction of the ski site. But the material whitening achieved through the act of cleansing was never complete and could not be sustained. The Hermon's unfavorable climate conditions, the security situation and even the local flora and fauna, exposed the efforts to create "a desire to feel like in Europe," and accentuated the multiple ways in which this unfulfilled aspiration rendered the mountain simultaneously as the paradigmatic Israel and "not Israeli enough".

In cases such as the one described there is an apparent inversion from the classical colonial encounter with space. Instead of colonizing the space by transplanting foreign elements such as trees for forestation or waterscapes by artificial irrigation schemes, it is the colonized space's natural features that render the space foreign and propels the colonizers to try to Europeanize it. However, the effort to Europeanize space, much like the effort of the colonized subject to imitate the colonizer, can never be completely accomplished. Hence space, like humans, holds within it the potential of rupturing the attempt to shape a pacified colonial space and can trigger a disruptive challenge to dominant discourses of power. Space, in other words, continually generates various forms of slippage, excess and difference, thereby producing certain ambivalences that do not fit well with the ideal image it is supposed to embody and produce.

1 Israel's State Archive (ISA) Gal 8262/4, "Summary of the reserve committee", 12 October 1967; ISA Gal 8262/4, letter discussing the surveys from Avraham Yoffe, Head of the Nature Reserves Authority, to Meir Shamir, Head of the Galilee Division of the Jewish Agency's Settlement Department, 28 November 1967; ISA Gal 8262/4 "Survey and regional planning in the Golan Heights", 26 November 1967; ISA C/51258, "Adjusting agricultural cultivations

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- to the Golan conditions", *Haaretz*, 17 December 1967; ISA Gal 4589/7, letter from the team of surveyors to the Central Bureau of Statistics in Israel, 25 July 1967 (in Hebrew).
- 2 Correspondence between officials from the Nature Reserves Authority and the Israeli military dated, January 8, January 12, March 8, March 17 1968, ISA Gal 11750/19 (in Hebrew).
 - 3 "A survey of the option of winter sports at the Hermon", November 30 1967, ISA Gal 11750/19; letters regarding the survey on the Hermon from the Israeli Ski club to the Nature Reserves Authority and the Jewish Agency, January 1, March 6, 1968, ISA Gal 11750/19(in Hebrew).
 - 4 "Hermon Authority", September 29 1968, ISA Gal 8263/2 (in Hebrew).
 - 5 A meeting held at the headquarters of the Israeli military's northern command, January 31 1968, ISA Gal 11750/19.
 - 6 Correspondence regarding "the Clearing of Jubata ruins", between the Israeli Land Administration, the Israeli military, the Nature Reserves Authority, and freelance survey teams on the ground: March 31, May 15, July 2, report on the importance of Jubata ez Zit's location; May, 22, a letter regarding salvageable sites in Jubata ez Zeit, October, 23 1968, ISA Gal 8262/4 (in Hebrew).
 - 7 "The villages of the Golan", a review by the "Golan Regional Team for Landscape and Recreation", undated, ISA Gal 8262/4 (in Hebrew).
 - 8 The allusion to crocodiles refers to Hamat Gader, an resort known for its geothermal hot springs since Roman times that was occupied by Syria during the 1948 war and seized by Israel in 1967 which subsequently turned it into a large crocodile farm. The vicinity to the Golan Heights enabled to include the crocs into the area's geopolitical discourse of being Israel's ultimate tourist hub.
 - 9 A report by the Israeli Ski Club to the Settlement Department of the Jewish Agency, January 24 1968; a letter from the Foreign Ministry's Department of Culture and Science liaison to the Hermon Authority; document entitled "The development of winter sports on the Hermon", published by the Nature Reserves Authority, April 29 1968; "Hermon Authority, press conference: main points", December 22 1968; see also letters from the Jewish Agency to the Hermon Authority, July 14 and September 11, 1969, ISA Gal 8262/2.

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- 10 "What is Ramat Shalom?" [undated], ISA G 2572/2.
- 11 The correspondence between the Hermon Authority, the Nature Reserves Authority, and botanists from the Israeli academy began on January 23 1969, ISA G 2572/2; see also "A summary regarding planting in the Hermon", June 25 1969, ISA Gal 11750/19 (in Hebrew).
- 12 Hermon Authority, press briefing, December 22 1968, ISA G 8262/3; Hermon Authority meeting regarding Ramat Shalom, March 15 1969; Discussion held at the Deputy Prime Minister's office regarding Ramat Shalom, March 26 1969; "Ramat Shalom: financial survey, preliminary examination", March 1969, ISA Gal 11750/19(in Hebrew).
- 13 Nonetheless the new settlers sank into financial difficulties, and Scott their leader was revealed to be not only eccentric (claiming on one occasion that God himself had ordered him to establish the colony) but as it turned out he was also wanted for drug trafficking by the F.B.I. Following his extradition to the US, the rest of the group disbanded and the colonization attempt was aborted.
- 14 Document entitled "Ramat Shalom: financial survey, a preliminary examination", March 1969, ISA G 2572/2.
- 15 Published in *Maariv* (untitled), March 15, 1968 (in Hebrew).
- 16 "Mumchim Le Sheleg" (experts on snow) [author unknown], *Ha-Olam Ha-Zeh*, February, 1968 (In Hebrew).
- 17 Report dated March 10 1969, ISA Gal 11750/19.
- 18 Briefing note from the Hermon Authority's director to the Israeli Radio, 16/2/1970, ISA Gal 8262/2 (in Hebrew).
- 19 Gadi Cohen, "Tourism in the Golan", unpublished research, dated 1983, GA 11350 700/04/05.
- 20 *Maariv*, 29/6/1970; Proceedings of the Hermon Authority, meetings from dates March 6, 1969; October 29, 1969; January 2, 1970; March 20, 1970; May 1, 1970 ISA 17274 (in Hebrew).

21 Author's interview with Rafi Lerman, the architect of the Hermon ski resort and head of the "Golan Regional Team for Landscape and Recreation", 28/4/2011; Author's interview with Yitzhak Zuella, a founding member of Neve-Ativ, 29/12/2008.

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